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2006 Reviewed, by Gillian Dooley. *Adelaide Review* 15 December 2006, p. 17.

The craze for life writing has produced a few outstanding books among the dross over the past year. Particularly interesting have been personal accounts from people whose jobs involve them in extraordinary events. Film-maker Bob Connolly, in *Making 'Black Harvest'*, writes powerfully and movingly about his experiences among the warring tribes in New Guinea, and in *The Weapons Detective* Rod Barton gives a sobering behind-the-scenes account of the search for weapons in Saddam's Iraq. Most dramatic of all is hotel manager Paul Rusesabagina's *An Ordinary Man*, which tells the story of his successful efforts to shelter more than a thousand Tutsis during the Rwanda genocide.

There have been some searing family memoirs. Donna Davis' *Sins of the Mothers* is a harrowing indictment of the treatment of children in Catholic children's homes in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, and Mary Loudon's *Relative Stranger* takes the reader with her on an uncomfortable journey of discovery of the world of her mentally ill sister, recently dead of cancer. Jill Golden's *Inventing Beatrice* is fiction, but based closely on the life of her mother, exploring a painful family history. On a lighter note, Clive James' *North Face of Soho*, the fourth volume of his autobiography, takes us on an entertaining trip through the 1970s. James has also produced another volume of essays this year, *The Meaning of Recognition*, a characteristic blend of wit and insight into culture high and low. In other non-fiction, journalist Barbara Ehrenreich goes under cover to expose the unhappy, shadowy world of middle-class job-seekers in corporate America in *Bait and Switch*, and Simon Nasht, in *The Last Explorer*, excavates the remarkable life of Hubert Wilkins, pioneer aviator and arctic explorer.

For me the best novels of the year were Peter Carey's *Theft*, predictably brilliant and entertaining, and M.J. Hyland's *Carry Me Down*, one of the most compelling and disturbing depictions of childhood I have read. Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* is a magnificent but flawed indigenous family saga, ultimately well worth persevering with. Several other Australian novelists have taken their characters overseas. Noah in Andrew O'Connor's *Tuvalu* is in Japan learning tentatively about life and love, while Gail Jones' Alice in *Dreams of Speaking* forms a friendship with Mr Sakamoto, a Japanese H-bomb survivor, in Paris. In *Silent Parts*, John Charalambous creates a likeable deserter from the army in the France of the First World War, a thoughtful chap who finds his own peace in the end. And Marion Halligan's *The Apricot Colonel* is a light-hearted and literate murder mystery, perfect for summer reading.